

Washington State Patrol Media Release

Chief Ronal W. Serpas



Office of the State Fire Marshal *State Fire Marshal Mary Corso*

Captain Glenn Cramer
Government and Media Relations
(360) 753-5299 – office
(360) 753-5469 – fax
<http://www.wa.gov/wsp/wsphome.htmff>

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Contact: Chief Deputy State Fire Marshal Anjela Foster
(360) 753-0493

State Fire Marshal Ensures Nursing Home Safety

Chief Ronal W. Serpas announced today that the Office of the State Fire Marshal continues to work diligently to ensure that all Washington State nursing homes are fire safe.

State Fire Marshal Mary Corso states, "The Office of the State Fire Marshal has a systematic approach to fire safety in state-licensed facilities and has aggressively been working with facility administrators and the fire service to ensure the high-risk residents of these facilities are afforded the highest level of protection."

In 2002, the Office of the State Fire Marshal inspected all 286 licensed nursing homes housing over 26,000 residents and 603 licensed boarding homes housing over 32,000 residents to evaluate fire and life safety code compliance. Fire Marshal Corso believes there is a responsibility chain between facility administrators and the fire service that must be tightly linked in order to ensure the safety of residents in these types of occupancies. The Office of the State Fire Marshal continues to work in cooperation with facility administrators to ensure success in providing safety to residents in their home environment with minimal impact to the day-to-day operation of the facility.

Fire Marshal Corso adds, "In providing the highest level of fire and life safety to residents, federally mandated fire codes require that facilities be designed and constructed to protect residents in place. This concept implements protection features that will confine the fire to its room of origin, thus reducing the need for occupant evacuation, except for in the room of fire origin." Because the safety of health care occupants cannot be ensured adequately by dependence on evacuation of the building, their protection from fire is provided by appropriate arrangement of facilities; adequate and trained staff; required detection, alarm, and extinguishment systems; fire prevention; and planning, design, and construction of the facility.

In an effort to increase fire and life safety in Washington State boarding homes, the Washington State Legislature has provided over \$2 million in fire sprinkler retrofit funding. To date, 44 facilities housing over 900 residents have had fire sprinkler systems installed through this grant program.

In contrast to the fire in Hartford, Connecticut, this week that claimed the lives of 10 residents, all nursing homes in Washington State are currently required by fire code to be fire sprinklered, with monitored alarms and detection devices. In reviewing information on the Hartford fire, it was found that no such protection was provided.

The Office of the State Fire Marshal is a Bureau of the Washington State Patrol, providing fire and life safety services to the citizens of Washington State, including inspections of state-licensed facilities, plan review of school construction projects, licensing of fire sprinkler contractors and pyrotechnic operators, training Washington State's firefighters, and collecting emergency response data. For additional information, you may visit our Web page at www.wa.gov/wsp and click on State Fire Marshal.

For more information on nursing or boarding home fire safety, contact the Office of the State Fire Marshal at (360) 753-0400.

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